

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for delivering goods ordered by a plurality of customers, comprising the steps of:

a plurality of customers placing orders for goods from a vendor;

the vendor fulfilling its orders by combining into a single shipping order the goods ordered by a plurality of customers who are geographically close to a single local pick-up; and

the vendor causing the single shipping order to be sent to a local pick-up point.

2. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the goods are ordered via the Internet.

3. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising notifying the customer when the order is available for pick-up.

4. A method according to Claim 1, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the vendor from the local pick-up point.

5. A method for designating local receipt of items ordered from a vendor at a remote location, comprising the steps of:

the customer providing to the vendor the customer's location;

the customer choosing from local pick-up points offered by the vendor; and

upon receipt of the ordered items at the local pick-up point, receiving notification that the order is available for pick-up.

6. A method according to Claim 5, wherein the designation is done via the Internet.

7. A method according to Claim 5, further comprising a step of the customer or customer's agent retrieving a collection of goods from the vendor from the local pick-up point.

8. A method according to Claim 5, further comprising:  
the customer selecting from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

9. A method for delivering goods ordered by a plurality of customers, comprising the steps of:  
a plurality of customers placing orders for goods from a plurality of vendors;

each vendor fulfilling their orders by combining into individual shipping orders the goods ordered by those from among the plurality of customers who are geographically close to respective local pick-up points; and

the vendors causing the respective shipping orders to be sent to the respective local pick-up points.

10. A method according to Claim 9, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods

from one or more of the plurality of vendors from the local pick-up point.

11. A method according to Claim 9, wherein the orders are placed via the Internet.

12. A method according to Claim 9, further comprising:  
the customer selecting from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

13. An apparatus for controlling delivery of goods to a plurality of customers, the apparatus comprising:

means for receiving orders from a plurality of customers;

means for fulfilling the customers' orders by combining into individual shipping orders the goods ordered by those from among the plurality of customers who are geographically close to respective local pick-up points; and

means for causing the respective shipping orders to be sent to the respective local pick-up points.

14. An apparatus according to Claim 13, wherein the orders are received via the Internet.

15. An apparatus according to Claim 13, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the local pick-up point.

16. An apparatus according to Claim 13, further including:

means operable to allow the customer to select from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

17. A system, having multiple vendors, for allowing the multiple vendors to consolidate shipping of goods to customers, each vendor having an apparatus comprising:

means for receiving orders from a plurality of customers;

means for fulfilling the customers' orders by combining into individual shipping orders the goods ordered by those from among the plurality of customers who are geographically close to respective local pick-up points; and

means for causing the respective shipping orders to be sent to the respective local pick-up points.

18. A system according to Claim 17, wherein the multiple vendors' apparatuses are connected on a network.

19. A system according to Claim 18, wherein the network is the Internet.

20. A system according to Claim 17, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the respective local pick-up point.

21. A system according to Claim 17, wherein each vendor's apparatus further comprises:

means operable to allow the customer to select from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

22. A shopping server on a network comprising a plurality of vendor servers, a plurality of customer client terminals, and local pick-up points, the shopping server being operable to:

receive orders from a customer terminal for purchase of a good;

communicate with one of the local pick-up points in proximity to the customer who ordered the good, to determine if the ordered good is currently available at the local pick-up point; and

if the good is not currently available at the local pick-up point, communicate with one of the vendor servers to initiate delivery of the ordered good to the local pick-up point.

23. A shopping server according to Claim 22, wherein the network is the Internet.

24. A shopping server according to Claim 22, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the local pick-up point.

25. A shopping server according to Claim 22, wherein the server is further operable to:

allow the customer to select from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

26. A system, having multiple vendors, for allowing the multiple vendors to consolidate shipping of goods to fulfill customer orders received over a network, each vendor having a network server operable to:

receive orders from a plurality of customers;

fulfil the customers' orders by combining into individual shipping orders the goods ordered by those from among the plurality of customers who are geographically close to respective local pick-up points; and

cause the respective shipping orders to be sent to the respective local pick-up points.

27. A system according to Claim 26, wherein the network is the Internet.

28. A system according to Claim 26, the network server being further operable to:

coordinate with the multiple vendors so as to arrange for shared shipping of ordered goods when respective ones from among the multiple vendors have received orders to be sent to the identical local pick-up points.

29. A system according to Claim 26, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the local pick-up point.

30. A system according to Claim 26, the network server being further operable to allow the customer to select from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.

31. Computer code executable on a network server, said code comprising:

code for receiving orders from a plurality of customers;

code for fulfilling the customers' orders by combining into individual shipping orders the goods ordered by those from among the plurality of customers who are geographically close to respective local pick-up points; and

code for causing the respective shipping orders to be sent to the respective local pick-up points.

32. Computer code according to Claim 31, wherein the network is the Internet.

33. Computer code according to Claim 31, wherein a customer or customer's agent retrieves a collection of goods from the local pick-up point.

34. Computer code according to Claim 31, further comprising code to allow the customer to select from among options relating to the pick-up point customized on the basis of the type of items ordered, and/or the pick-up capability of the customer.